10: d'Orleans--275 [2] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 463, 471, 556, 563 Ethnic subgroups

"...Our boatmen assemble round us. I talk to them, and they tell me that they are engaged upon the pirogues for the benefit of the owner (usually a Laotian), who stands at the helm. To them a boat represents a large capital; the one in which I travel is worth sixty-seven rupees. As a rule the owner trades with them, a pirogue can carry about thirty-six thengs (a theng weighs about thirty-four pounds). The boatmen are chiefly hired from among the Kas;"

10: d'Orleans--307 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 461, 463, 511, 556

[LSS: at Luang Prabang] "The men do but little work, labour in the mines and the cultivation of the soil being left to the Kas and it is only in the towns that they are found engaging in any artistic occupation, such as the making of jewellery or the chasing of silver. Even those who do work rarely do so for more than seven hours a day, and the woman keep the pot boiling by spinning silk and making various materials, though they do not overwork themselves. When a household is very hard pressed the men seek employment as boatmen, and are very expert, making enough in a month or two to keep them the rest of the year, so that if there are few large fortunes, most of the inhabitants have enough to live upon in comfort, preferring freedom and tranquillity to an excess of labour, which would only give them what they do not want. Moreover, when they do happen to have put by a decent sum of money, they go and spend it at the pagoda, either in fulfilment of a vow or in payment of some religious ceremony. This is their only luxury, nor, indeed, do they regard it as one, for they reckon upon profiting by it in another world."

10: d'Orleans--344-345 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 443, 527, 556

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"We pay an early visit to the market and find the streets crowded, the women being attired in their finest things, and being loaded with bracelets and necklaces of gold, while the market itself is full of [345] birds in cages, which it is considered to be a very meritorious act to purchase and let loose. This Laos custom is very general among the Buddhists, and I remember seeing at Batang a Chinese soldier who, as he caught his fish, put them into a bucketful of water, the Thibetans giving him money at the close of the day to put them back into the river."

68: Mouhot--154 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 431, 576, 556, 609

"I am literally pillaged by these petty mandarins and chiefs of villages, [HD: in southern Luang Prabang province] and have to give away guns, sabres, lead, powder, colours, pencils, and even my paper; and then, after having received their presents, they will not put themselves out of their way to do me the smallest service. I would not wish my most deadly foe, if I had one, to undergo all the trouble and persecution of this kind which I have encountered."

68: Mouhot--272-273 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians-1-2
116, 644, 556, 609

"[HD: Excerpt from a letter written by Mouhot in Luang Prabang to his brother] After waiting for ten days I have at length been presented to the king with great pomp. The reception room was a shed such as they build in our villages on fête-days , but larger and hung with every possible colour. His Majesty was enthroned at one end of the hall, lazily reclining on a divan, having on his right hand four guards squatting down, and each holding a sabre: behind were the princes all prostrated, and farther off the [273] senators, with their backs to the public and their faces in the dust; then in front of his Majesty was your poor brother, dressed all in white, and seated on a carpet, with teacups, basins, and spittoons in silver placed by his side, contemplating this grotesque scene, and having some trouble to preserve his gravity as he smoked his pipe. The visit cost me a gun for the king and various small presents for the princes, for one cannot travel here without being well furnished with presents for the kings, princes, and mandarins. Luckily it is not here as in Siam; the natives are willing to help me, and for a few inches of brass wire I get a beautiful longicorn or some other insect, and these are brought to me on all sides: thus I have succeeded in largely increasing my collection, but five pieces of red cloth [HD: brought as a trade item] have disappeared already.

The day after my first audience I had another from the second king, who wished also for a present. I sought among my stock, which anywhere else would cause me to be

68: Mouhot--272-273 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians-2
116, 644, 556, 609

taken for a dealer in old stores, and found a magnifying glass and a pair of old-fashioned spectacles with round glasses, which make him look like a gorilla without hair, a little cake of soap (he had great need of it), a bottle of eau-de-cologne, and a bottle of brandy. This last was opened on the spot and duly appreciated. You see all this is expensive, but I am obliged to pay these good people, and the king has been kind to me, and is going to carry my letters for me." [HD: on his trip to Bangkok to pay tribute to the King of Siam]

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

sufficient for his requirements. If there are six members of the family, six standard, equal sized portions of land will be cultivated. If a child is born into the family another piece of land is cleared and worked. When a member of the family dies, whether it be a baby or the grandfather, cultivation of his portion will be stopped. Just enough is produced for the family to eat and to provide a small surplus sold in the market – *with the bonze's approval* – to buy occasional strict necessities, like a silk shawl and a bicycle for the daughter. There is no social insurance and there are no poor. The old and the sick are supported by the young, or, where they are left without able-bodied providers, by the community, and the bonzes give instructions for the necessary land to be placed under cultivation for them. The accumulation of wealth which is not to be used for definite, approved purposes, causes a man to lose prestige among his neighbours, just, as in the West, the process is reversed. The main difference, it seems, between Buddhism in Indo-China, and Christianity – apart from any question as to their relative merits – is that, whether we admire it or not, the former is largely put into practice.

It is a stimulating reflection that the Western millionaire, obsessed for the sake of social distinction with the amassing of enormous possessions – little of which he can personally consume – would attain the same ends of personal celebrity under a Laotian Buddhistic order of things by his priestly austerities – by embracing the most abject and prestige-conferring form of poverty.

For this reason perhaps the local Evangelist missionary and his wife have made no converts. Like all who have lived among the Laotians they are charmed with them – although, of course, disappointed at their blindness. They also deplore their immorality.

In the matter of converts the Evangelists have been no more unsuccessful than their Portuguese, Spanish and French forerunners. The Laotians having little capacity for abstractions, either in their

291 or less degree lightens its rather dark color. The skirt is a true cylinder, with the same diameter all along its length. A woman raises the skirt in a mass like a crown above her head, lets it slide down along her body and fastens it to her waist, without any hooks or fasteners, by tucking it in along her stomach, which is largely left bare. A brightly colored sash of cotton or silk is thrown over one shoulder, sometimes covering the breasts, to complete the costume.

"During the cold season, where there is a winter, a few women cover their trunks with a short jacket. This garment finds favor mainly outside the larger centers.

302 "A certain number of women wear their hair cut in Bressant style, in accordance with the style imported by the Siamese. The greater number wear their long hair rolled into a coil on the top or side of the head. Women's coiffures vary, moreover, depending on the region and on whether they are married or single.

292 "For great ceremonies, wealthy women wear skirts made of cloth spangled with gold or silver, and sashes of the same type.

"In Luang-Prabang they add a silk or velvet jacket decorated with embroidery on the neck, front and cuffs. Merchants can be found in this city who rent out costumes of this type, as well as gold jewelry, for great ceremonies to women who do not have any." (Le Laos français.)

301 Jewelry. Jewels find great favor among the [179] Laotians and 556 are used to complete and enrich their costume. They are not only ornaments, but also the most widespread method for realizing and preserving the liquid part of their fortune. In fact, the inhabitants transform the greater part of [Illustration here] their savings and profits into jewelry, and since they wear them on their body they are spared the use of strongboxes.

[583] The women and children are the ones who wear jewels most. They go into the trousseau of the young bride, and parents give them to their children as the latter grow up, thus putting together a sort of dowry for the time when they reach the age of marriage.

301 [180] Gold and silver are used in making jewelry, and precious 306 stones such as rubies, sapphires and various genuine or imitation gems are sometimes added as ornaments.

Gold is not used in all parts of Laos, but is mainly limited to the large centers located near regularly worked gold-bearing deposits. [563] Doubtless because of the application of ancient sumptuary laws, silver is the only metal used by certain races--even by the Khas,

505 Large quantities of nep (rice suitable
438 for making alcohol), hides, horn, cardamom, wax, benzoin, various gums, etc. were shipped from Bassac, from Pakse, from Savannakhet, from Vien-Tiane and from other Laotian centers which had formerly traded exclusively with Bangkok by way of the Nongkay-Outaradit route on the Menam and by the Korat route on the Se-Moun.

505 "Passenger traffic, which was almost nil when the new services
484 were established, is increasing every day. The natives are beginning to become familiar with this rapid, convenient and inexpensive manner of traveling which the steamship represents and they are making more frequent use thereof, a fact which can only contribute to the broadening of relations between the various posts scattered along the great river and increase trade in their products of all kinds" (1).

(1) See, in Appendix XXX, the transport rates between France and Indo-China and between Saigon and Laos.

[487] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER XI
1. SOCIAL STATUS. SLAVERY

[565] Upon our arrival in Laos, we found a hierarchial society com-
567 prised of nobles, commoners and slaves. We could not do better than to preserve all features of the political, social and administrative
178 organization just as it had been. In this respect we took our inspira-
177 tion from our predecessors the Siamese, leaving our new subjects the utmost liberty and respecting their traditions, customs and mores insofar as these were compatible with our own institutions.

Thus we were at times forced to recall certain native officials who had compromised themselves with the Siamese, or who through their exactions had made themselves unworthy of their office. Moreover, we have always acted tactfully and mildly, [488] leaving the choice of officials to election, in accordance with custom.

But above all, we took radical measures by completely suppressing the slave trade and by regularizing a very mild form of slavery for debt.

[556] There used to be slavery in Laos, as in Siam, in the form of slavery by capture, by purchase and for debt. It yielded high profits for those who engaged in the traffic, for the children and grandchildren of slaves were slaves themselves at birth, a fact which increased the fortunes of their masters to that extent.

[124]

APPENDIX XXI

NOTES ON GOLD-BEARING DEPOSITS

1. DEPOSITS OF NAM-BENG AND NAM-NGAO

(District of Pak-Ta--Luang-Prabang)

316

These deposits, which are situated in the principality of Luang-Prabang a hundred kilometers west of the capital, are made up of alluvial beds in the valleys formed by the left-bank tributaries of the Mekong (Nam-Beng, Nam-Ngao, Nam-Ta, etc.).

[643 556]

Before our settlement in Laos, these deposits had long constituted part of the patrimony of the kings of Luang-Prabang. It was from here that they extracted all the gold needed not only to pay their tributes of vassaldom to the Chinese, Annamite and Siamese sovereigns, but also to make purchases in Bangkok and cast gold articles and massive pieces of jewelry for their family, as well as the insignia of officials.

Our own prospecting trips to these deposits in 1893 and 1894 yielded, merely by washing in a wash-trough and without amalgamation, "crude gold" which was clearly visible in the form of nuggets, grains and dust. Moreover, from natives who worked these deposits we acquired nuggets which were obtained by means of this same rudimentary process and which varied in weight from two to forty-five grams. We even saw nuggets of unrolled "or crespelé" weighing 140 and 225 grams, which came from the same place. What is more, it is not unusual to meet children wearing nuggets hung around their neck like amulets--nuggets which vary in volume from the size of a hazelnut to that of a pressed fig.

[301]

The gentle slope and short length of the valleys where the deposits are found, and the proximity of the mountains from which the gold comes, are precious indications of the presence of outcropping lodes. Moreover, the appearance of the crespelé metal, as if it were spongy, [125] to which particles of quartz still adhere, is a confirmation of this hypothesis.

In 1895 a corporation called the "Mining and agricultural company of Laos" ["Société minière et agricole du Laos"], with a capital of 150,000 francs, was established in Paris through our efforts. It sent M. Isnard, a mining engineer, to the locality to study the deposits of gold and precious stones which we had prospected.

A corporation with a capital of several millions was later to take the place of the study group.